

Eight Awesome German Words with No English Equivalent

by Ignatius Graham in Languages, January 12, 2012

Sometimes there just isn't a word for what you want to say. But sometimes, there is—in German.

The German language is one that has fully embraced the compound word. I've heard it said, even by German-speakers, that if there's no German word for a concept, the Germans will just make one up. Perhaps English could take a lesson, especially considering these eight words that succinctly describe ideas that English-speakers obviously have but need many more words to express.

1. **Schadenfreude:** Every non-German speaker's favorite German word, *Schadenfreude* literally means "harm-joy", and it's used for the feeling of taking pleasure in someone else's misfortune or unhappiness. Like *The Simpsons'* Nelson jeering "Ha ha!" or your smile when you find out something unfortunate happened to your ex.
2. **Fremdscham:** Almost the opposite of *Schadenfreude*, *Fremdscham* is the feeling of being embarrassed for someone else (presumably someone who's not embarrassed for themselves, but should be).
3. **Torschlusspanik** (literally: goal ending panic) Fear of decreasing opportunities as time passes. It's the feeling that you're running out of time and the pressure is on. It's often used to refer to a woman's "biological clock" and increasing desire to have children, but I wonder if it could also be used for college kids who feel they need to have their fun now before being released into the drudgery of a full-time job, or simply for people growing older and worried about all the things they've yet to do.
4. **Waldeinsamkeit:** (literally: forest loneliness) A feeling of solitude in the forest.
5. **Weltschmerz:** Literally, "world-pain". When you watch the news, and it's all about war and murder and global warming and political catfights, and you start to wonder if there's any good left in the world at all, and get completely depressed about the state of things... that feeling you have is *Weltschmerz*. Getting down about how far off the world is from what would be ideal.
6. **Fernweh:** My personal favorite, *Fernweh* is the opposite of homesickness; it's a longing to venture out into the world. Almost like wanderlust, but sadder and lonelier.

Think homesickness—that same sense of not just wanting something, but missing it—in reverse.

7. **Gemütlichkeit**: “the warm fuzzy feeling you get when you are cozy, a little drunk, and surrounded by friends”. What a great word. Similar to the Danish word *hygge*.

8. **Stammtisch**: This strangely specific word means a gathering of friends at a bar, to talk about life. The “Tisch” (table) is usually the same table or spot, at the same time, on the same day of the week, so that you and your “homies” can find each other easily. In other words, many of the sitcoms of the last few decades.

What do you think? Could you find a use for most of these words in English conversations?

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